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ABSTRACT

Not only do we need to give students a strong educational foundation, we also must counteract cultural and psychosocial factors that turn minority students away from a curriculum. One of the most powerful aspects of an outdoor education program is that it can provide participants with unique opportunities to work together to solve problems, thus exercising critical thinking skills and enhancing communication among group members. In instances where relatively few members of a group are of a different cultural background, token dynamics come into play. Three strategies for avoiding tokenism are: cluster people in numerically balanced groups; provide positive role models for people who are numerically few in a group; and educate staff, leaders, and group members about token dynamics. In addition to accurate and diverse instructional materials, preservice and inservice education is needed to help teachers learn about the diverse groups with which they will be working. Whenever possible, preservice teachers' field-based experiences should be in culturally diverse settings with cooperating teachers from different cultural backgrounds. Teachers must also examine their own perceptions and biases toward diversity. Five aspects to address in developing multicultural curricula for the outdoors are uniqueness, empowerment, belonging, security, and purpose. Criteria for an outdoor education program that provides equity and embraces diversity address how to begin, opportunities to include in the program, strategies for facilitating multicultural groups, and tips on how to be an accepting teacher. (Contains 17 references.) (TD)

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Educating Multicultural Groups Outdoors
by Marie Bernardy

I am a member of the dominant social group of this country: heterosexual, white, Gentile, able-bodied/minded, middle class. I fit into one "subordinate group" by virtue of gender: female. It is therefore safe to guess that by this association I have had very little held back from me due to assumptions made about me because of my race, religion, or socio-economic standing. The social standards and norms set by the dominant social group of which I am a member have made it possible for me to achieve certain levels of success with little struggle.

From an educational standpoint, every person who is ever a student should have equal opportunities for success. Given the issues of bias, prejudice and general misunderstandings directed at minority groups, that will not always be the case. As an educator it is important to me to treat all students with fairness and equity (although individuals may not be treated exactly the same in a given situation). I understand that I will not be working with students just from the dominant social group and I will need skills and sensitivities that may not be apparent to me, not having struggled with many minority group issues.

To begin with, certain subject areas are directed more at particular ethnic groups and held back from others. In 1991, *Jet* magazine reported in six lines that Dr. Kenneth Olden became director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. Suddenly, he was a local hero in the black community where he grew up - not for his scientific accomplishments, but for the mention in *Jet*. This story speaks to a neglected aspect of efforts to increase the number of minority group members in science and engineering careers. Not only do we need to give students a strong educational foundation, we also must counteract cultural and psychosocial factors that turn minority students away from science (or any part of the curriculum). Many minority communities consider research irrelevant, so kids do too. Programs aimed at opening up science to minorities must reach beyond schools and into our communities and families (Olden, 1993).

I believe that a similar problem holds true for outdoor education. From my own experience working in outdoor education, I can report that 75% or more of the people with whom I come into contact are from the dominant social group of which I am a member. The programs I am familiar with are taught and administered by white people and are therefore developed and presented from that perspective. Zelda Lockhart, a graduate student of English literature, poet and former president of the Board of Directors of the Women's Wilderness Network says, "I do not think that black women are not aware of outdoor activities; it's just that black women may think it's a white thing. They seem to be socialized to believe that participating in outdoor adventure is white person's thing to do; it's not a white thing, it's a life thing (Roberts & Drogin 1993)."

The implications of multicultural education for outdoor educators lie closely with trends in mainstream education. I have addressed two major themes in this paper to apply the information to educating multicultural groups outdoors: 1) specific areas of activity that groups are likely to be involved in during an outdoor education program (i.e. service projects and group initiative/challenge activities), and how group dynamics are affected in multicultural settings, and 2) the need for professional development in the area of multicultural education. I have included lists of criteria to assist the professional in developing outdoor education programs for multicultural groups at the end of the paper.

From personal experience working with minority groups outdoors, I can report that dynamics were different, even strained among the group and between the students and myself. I would attribute much of this feeling to the group members' unfamiliarity with the "classroom". Generally the minority groups I have taught outdoors come from the city and at times they are visibly uncomfortable; they feel exposed and vulnerable in the outdoors. I had a college group of

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Black Studies students walking through the woods with me to get to the "Initiatives/Challenge Course" when we encountered a group of deer. I had to yell over the din of conversation along the trail to announce that we were coming upon some deer. This news actually scared one man of about 21 years of age. He ran and hid behind his teacher and started talking really fast, wondering if the animals would come near us or even hurt us. What would normally be a teaching moment for me turned into a learning moment. I felt terrible that I scared this person. However, this experience reminded me of a time when I may have reacted similarly. Having grown up in a suburban area, I did not find it comforting to have free-roaming wildlife around me when I first moved to a rural area. I have been living closer to nature for a long time now and the associated feelings and memories of fear and are in the far reaches of my mind. But this young man pointed out something very important to me: do not take it for granted that everyone will have a good experience in an outdoor education program just because it's meant to be fun and it takes place in the beauty of nature. The very things that I think will lend to a memorable and positive experience could turn out to be the things that make a memorable and horrendous experience for people with different perspectives.

One of the most powerful aspects of an outdoor education program is that it can provide participants with unique opportunities to work together to solve problems. Sometimes problem solving activities are planned by teachers. For example the Initiative/Challenge course I mentioned is a string of physically and mentally challenging activities that the group must perform together to solve a given problem. The whole point of being on the course is to exercise critical thinking skills and to enhance communication among group members. In many programs, opportunities for problem solving and exercising communication skills will crop up in other places. The following examples of outdoor oriented multicultural programs will explain.

Craig Sarbeck, an instructor for Educo International that leads programs for young adults to Africa, South America, Russia, Europe, India and Asia, writes, "in multicultural programs, like any gathering of people, each person comes with their ideas of the way they see things, their personal ethic, their ideals. In their first encounters, we find students eagerly sharing their concepts and ideas about how to change the world, how to better conditions, how to end all the problems besetting us. Then as the trip progresses, simple daily tasks like cooking, cleaning and service projects that require hard work, begin to overshadow the ideals. Friction builds as students begin to observe others who may not be pulling their fair shares. At some point, usually not too far into the trip, these small rough areas always come to the forefront. It is at this point that a new dynamic develops, one that is best described as a new culture (1992)."

Robert Burkhardt, Jr., Executive Director of the San Francisco Conservation Corps discusses importance of hard work coupled with "minds at work". "Labor intensive, hands-on, hard physical work can offer opportunities which challenge youths to grow in skills and abilities. However, labor alone is an insufficient instructor. Cerebral skills such as curiosity, making connections and synthesis must be practiced regularly by the young if they are to become healthy life habits in maturity. The appropriate role of the "teacher" is to maintain a high level of intensity, demanding the engagement displayed by minds at work, whether on the job site or in "class". "Students" need a variety of ways to link learning and life, in which growing minds are challenged by new information, situations and questions which impel response." Mr. Burkhardt describes many scenes and activities that take place as part of the Corps program. My favorite scene is at the end of a hard days physical and mental work and the students are ready to go home: "What do other [people] think when they see a group of young Latino, Black, Asian and White workers...climb on the bus energetically arguing ethical and moral questions? It seems to me that they see the future of their city (1989)."

Looking back on my story about the deer in the woods with the Black Studies group, I realize that the cross-cultural connection between my students and me provided an experiential learning opportunity for me even though I was the "leader" or "teacher" in this situation. Richard Kraft, a

Professor in the School of Education at the University of Colorado in Boulder believes that "cross-cultural programs are perhaps our most powerful experiential learning environments", more so than *where* the program takes place - in the classroom or outdoors. "It is in cross-cultural settings within our own society and internationally that the most powerful, life-changing experiential learning can, and often does occur. We may be shattered by culture shock, but if we persevere, the lessons can be overwhelmingly powerful and life-changing. I believe it is only when all of the cues which prop up our racial, gender, ethnic, religious and cultural biases are knocked out from under us, that we can begin the process of becoming caring and compassionate people who can reach out to a world filled with millions of suffering and dying people. Our schools and communities are as segregated as ever along class, racial and ethnic lines. Experiential education, particularly in the cross-cultural sense, is one extremely powerful tool for helping us bridge those gaps (1992)." "It is vital to be aware of one's own cultural blinders and assume nothing. I am always cautious of issues that raise the most intense emotional reaction in myself or my students. Invariably, the emotions arise from an incomplete understanding of a situation (Sarbeck, 1992)." These "expert" opinions and written accounts of learning in multicultural settings further convince me that these are opportunities for all participants to break down their stereotypes, change their very ways of thinking and perceiving and *grow*!

So far, I have discussed programs with the multicultural group as a central and planned component of a program. What about instances where only one (or relatively few) member(s) of a group happens to be of a different cultural background? Mary McClintock, a leader of therapeutic wilderness trips for women and consultant on issues of cultural diversity, writes about *token dynamics* : a product of both numerical imbalance (number of minority members: number of majority members) and the lesser status of the person in the token role. For example when a person of color is in a group of white people, or a woman is in a group of men, token dynamics will occur. The presence of members of previously excluded groups may appear to be progress towards equality when actually token dynamics maintains inequity by preventing people from being successful. Token dynamics hurt everyone by creating stresses and barriers to productivity for people who are in token roles and by preventing all members of a group from benefiting from the full participation of all group members. As experiential educators who seek to provide positive learning experiences for all participants, we need to know about the destructive dynamics of tokenism and how to avoid them. Following is a list of strategies for working against tokenism when teaching in the outdoors:

1. Cluster people in groups which are numerically balanced, even if this means some groups have none of a particular type of person.

2. Work to provide positive role models for people who are numerically few in a group; this can help people deal with the stresses of being isolated and help to break down stereotyping on the part of majority group members.

3. Educate staff, leaders and group members about token dynamics. Awareness that the structure of the situation rather than the person's characteristics is creating token dynamics is the first step to changing the dynamics (1989).

This points to the need of professional development in multicultural education issues and trends. Selecting accurate and diverse instructional materials is only part of the formula for addressing the need for appreciation of diversity. Another crucial step is to provide preservice and inservice education to help teachers learn about the diverse groups with which they currently work or will work with in the future (Escamilla, 1992).

In effort to create a climate that appreciates diversity, teachers must realize that attitudes are shaped by what happens in groups. To achieve development of cultural pride, self-esteem, and respect for diversity in our students, teachers must respect diversity and display an appreciation of students and their heritage (Escamilla, 1992). Research suggests that teacher decisions are more important than either written curriculum or texts in determining the actual content of instruction. Further, these instructional decisions often rest on teachers' personal experiences rather than the written curricula (Manly-Casimir & Wasserman, 1989). This finding is important for several reasons.

Nationally, 25% of our students are nonwhite, while only 10% of our teaching force is nonwhite. In urban districts, these numbers grow to 70% nonwhite students with a nonwhite teaching force of 30%. Minority student populations are on a rapid increase (Broun, 1992). Given these facts, many teachers probably lack the firsthand experiences and knowledge necessary to integrate readily the history and culture of minority groups (Escamilla, 1992).

Training to live and work in culturally diverse environments should begin during preservice education and be carried on throughout one's career in order for effective changes to be made. Whenever possible, the preservice teachers' field-based and clinical experiences should be in culturally diverse settings, placed with cooperating teachers from cultural backgrounds different from their own. For many inservice teachers, reeducation will be necessary. While teachers cannot possibly achieve multicultural competencies in a single course or workshop, this is the essential first step. Teachers must also examine and evaluate their own perceptions and biases toward diversity; self-study is a viable form of inservice education. We must study our own backgrounds and learn the meaning and function of culture. Interactions with others who are different from ourselves are vital to learning, understanding and appreciating diversity (Pahnos & Butt, 1995; Howard, 1989).

Below I have listed criteria for use in shaping an outdoor education program to provide equity and embrace the diversity in which we live. Not every part of each list may be addressed in each activity or lesson, but the suggestions are valuable and these ideas will help to better target the needs of culturally diverse groups outdoors.

Specifically address these five aspects in developing multicultural curricula for the outdoors:

1. Uniqueness - the special qualities of the participants.
2. Empowerment - instill the belief that everyone can do what they set out to do.
3. Belonging - each member of the group has a place, a role.
4. Security - the rules will be established and enforced equitably.
5. Purpose - set realistic goals and provide for challenge (Howard 1985).

How do you begin? Does your curriculum:

1. Develop higher level decision-making skills?
2. Teach social participation skills?
3. Develop skills necessary for both interpersonal and intercultural interaction?
4. Question stereotyping?
5. Provide curriculum and instruction materials that are personally meaningful to students of diverse backgrounds?
6. Have a variety of culturally different games and activities?
7. Address bias and prejudice reduction?
8. Teach conflict resolution skills?
9. Use evaluation techniques that are sensitive to students' diversity and that allow different ways for students to demonstrate achievement?
10. Improve self-esteem and confidence of diverse learners through its methods and

materials?

11. Make maximum use of community and local resources? (Gay, 1988; Matiella, 1991; Pahnos & Butt 1994)

In your program, try to include opportunities to:

1. Have participants show/share things about their ethnic backgrounds.
2. Encourage them to work together in cooperative settings.
3. Involve all participants in all settings.
4. Encourage participants to select assignments and roles that allow for personal expression.
5. Help participants identify their skills and abilities/strengths and weaknesses (Pahnos & Butt, 1995).

Strategies for facilitating multicultural groups include:

1. Clearly explaining participants' roles in assignments.
2. Regularly checking for comprehension throughout the activity, not just at the end.
3. Giving positive messages.
4. Providing clear and constructive feedback on physical and social skills and academic accomplishments.
5. Using heterogeneous terms and groups.
6. Helping participants accept, respect and celebrate differences through activities and assignments.
7. Complimenting verbal information with culturally diverse visual aids and illustrations (Kinsella, 1994; Kinsella and Sherak, 1994; Matiella, 1991)

And, finally, as an accepting teacher, you should:

1. Communicate your uncertainty to students and invite them to share theirs.
2. Acknowledge your ambivalence about raising provocative issues.
3. Listen without judging.
4. Create zones of silence where participants (and you) can compose their thoughts.
5. Have participants evaluate underlying assumptions made in their statements.
6. Maintain as top priority the examination of differing viewpoints.
7. Acknowledge the legitimacy of anger (Pahnos & Butt, 1995).

Every lesson planned must include strategies that bring students closer together in their understanding of appreciation for differences (Pahnos & Butt, 1995). Through study, careful planning and deliberate self-exposure to culturally diverse educational situations, the outdoor educator has the opportunity to provide a unique program that will assist in bringing people together, from all walks of life. I feel fortunate be working in a field that "naturally" lends itself to learning something new and exciting in unusual, unconventional ways and that lead to a better understanding of the world and the people with which we live.

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